DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 100 814 SP 008 720

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TITLE The Effects of Pre-Service Participation upon Performance in Student Teaching.
PUB DATE 74
NOTE 6p.; For related document, see SP 008 721

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS College Supervisors; Comparative Analysis; Higher Education; *Preservice Education; Questionnaires; *Student Evaluation; *Student Teachers

ABSTRACT

A pilot study was conducted to determine if a program providing early classroom teaching contacts for undergraduate students leads to graduates who are better prepared. It was hypothesized that participants in a preservice program would be judged more favorably in terms of general performance than would past students who had not had such an experience. Classroom supervisors of these individuals were asked to evaluate them in comparison to other student teachers from Western Illinois University that they had supervised. Fifteen supervisors were mailed questionnaires, which made no mention of the student's preservice experience, and were asked to rate the student teacher "weaker than," "same as," of "better than" previous student teachers. Results indicated that preservice programs favorably affected performance in student teaching. Some positive characteristics of the students with preservice training included a greater speed of adjustment to the classroom routine and stronger classroom management and leadership skills. In conclusion, student teachers who had participated in a preservice program were judged significantly better than past student teachers on 7 out of 17 items, which supports the intuition that a preservice program can lead to a better-equipped graduate. (JCW)

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THE EFFECTS OF PRE-~~SCHOOL~~ SERVICE PARTICIPATION UPON PERFORMANCE IN STUDENT TEACHING

by

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Institutions of higher education have professed a concern for the quality of the neophyte produced by their teacher education program. The development of Action Goals for the 1970's by the Illinois Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction inspired Western Illinois University with the cooperation of OSPI and the Springfield Public Schools to begin a pilot program providing early classroom teaching contacts for undergraduate students. It was hoped that this performance program would improve the quality of the beginning teacher who graduated from Western.

This program like most pilot programs was expensive. The role of the educator "changed from that of a dispenser of knowledge to a director of learning experiences."[1] This necessitated a closer relationship between this director and the student and reduced the student-teacher ratio below that which was currently in most colleges of education. As the cost increased one justifiably asked was the program worth it. Students said it was, supervising teachers and administrators praised the program, participating faculty were enthusiastic, but the question remained did the program lead to better prepared graduates. In order to partially answer this question a pilot study was conducted in the Springfield area in the spring of 1974. The subjects were participants from the "Center" program who were student teaching or had recently

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finished student teaching. Classroom supervisors of these individuals were asked to evaluate them in comparison to other student teachers they had supervised from Western Illinois University. It was hypothesized that student teachers who had been participants in a Center (pre-service) program would be judged more favorably in terms of general performance than past students who had not had such an experience. No attempt was made to predict specific areas of differences though the pilot instrument was devised with hopes of providing information as to specific areas.

METHOD

Subjects and General Procedure

Fifteen classroom supervisors within the Springfield area were mailed questionnaires evaluating their student teachers. Twelve of the fifteen returned their questionnaires completed. The three who did not complete the forms explained that these were their first student teachers from Western and thus they had no basis for comparison.

Format

A seventeen item questionnaire was sent to each supervising teacher who had a student that had completed the "Center" program. The instructions read:

> We are interested in your evaluation of ____(name)____ in comparison to student teachers you have had or known from Western Illinois University in prior years. This evaluation will be kept confidential. It will not be part of the credentials of the student, but will be used to help us evaluate our Teacher Education program.

No mention was made of the student's pre-service experience. On each of the seventeen items the classroom supervisor was asked to rate the

student teacher as weaker than, same as, or better than previous student teachers. Comments regarding teaching performance were solicited at the end of the questionnaire.

Results

It was expected that by chance 4 students or 1/3 of the population should be judged as better than previous student teachers. Data from the weaker than and same as cell were combined and a one-sample chi square analysis was carried out for each item of the questionnaire. On seven of the seventeen items a significant difference was found between ratings of the student teachers and what was considered chance expectancy. The hypothesis that student teachers who had been participants in a center program would be judged more favorably in terms of general performance that previous student teachers who had not had such an experience was supported at the .01 level of significance ($x^2 = 7.59$, df = 1). Other areas where pre-service participants were rated better were:

1. Speed of adjustment to classroom routine ($x^2 = 11.34$, df = 1, $p < .001$)
2. Willingness to begin classroom instruction ($x^2 = 15.84$, df = 1, $p < .001$)
3. Comparison with known studen' teachers ($x^2 = 7.59$, df = 1, $p < .01$)
4. Professional attitude ($x^2 = 4.59$, df = 1, $p < .05$)
5. Classroom leadership ($x^2 = 4.59$, df = 1, $p < .05$)
6. Classroom management ($x^2 = 4.59$, df = 1, $p < .05$)

Discussion

This pilot study was a beginning from which further research should emanate. The results indicated that pre-service programs favorably affect performance in student teaching. Of particular interest were differences in speed of adjustment to classroom routine and willingness to begin instruction. These items were most notably affected by a pre-service program. This would indicate that the student teacher with pre-service experience can spend less time observing and more time participating and practicing under the guidance of the supervisor while student teaching. The student teachers with pre-service experience were also deemed stronger on classroom management and leadership which suggested that they felt more comfortable with the teaching role. This was congruent with the desire to begin instruction. The higher rating on professional attitude may be a result of the students having experienced the role and its expectations and having adopted it prior to student teaching. The pre-service program provided opportunities for students to experience the role of teacher early in their college years and possibly those participants who found the teacher role-professional attitude incompatible with their life style dropped out of the teacher education program. This was a possible area for further research.

Results close to but not reaching the .05 level of significance were obtained on items such as (1) used effective methods, (2) used instructional materials effectively, and (3) used individualized instruction ($.10 > p > .05$). With an increased sample size and a more refined instrument it was expected that further areas of difference would be found.

In conclusion the pilot study empirically supported the intuitive feelings that a pre-service program can lead to a better equipped graduate of Western's teacher education program. A more extensive followup is

planned for the future based on the date from the study.

Summary

A pilot study measuring the effectiveness of a pre-service "Center" program providing early classroom experience for education students was conducted by the Springfield Center of Western Illinois University. Supervising teachers were asked to evaluate their supervisees on seventeen items. On seven of these items the performance of the student teachers who participated in a pre-service program was judged as significantly better than past student teachers. This study was a start from which a more refined instrument and a larger scale project will emanate. The results indicated the program was having the desired effect.

REFERENCES

1. An Operational Paper Identifying Functions and Responsibilities of Participating Agencies in the Preservice and In-Service Programs for Educational Improvement in the Schools of Springfield, Illinois. . . College of Education, Western Illinois University, June 30, 1972.